

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation  
Albuquerque Area Office  
Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Drought relief Water Well at Taos Pueblo  
Taos County, New Mexico**

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August 9, 2005  
Date

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August 9, 2005  
Date

FONSI Number: AAO-05-003

## **Summary of the Proposed Action**

The Bureau of Reclamation has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the funding of construction and installation of a pump house, drilling site, staging area, and drought relief well. Taos Pueblo continues to experience dry periods due to drought conditions. Reclamation would be funding the proposed drought relief well project under the Emergency Drought Relief Program and the Native American Program.

## **Background**

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide funding for a drought relief well for Taos Pueblo during times of drought. The project is needed to supply the pueblo with a source of additional water during times of drought for other community needs to include, fire protection, livestock watering, road construction and construction. Extreme water shortages have forced Taos to pursue federal assistance under the Reclamation Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991, Public Law 102-250. This proposed well is located in Taos Pueblo, Taos County, New Mexico.

The well would be drilled by a private contractor and would be approximately 250' ± deep with 10" casing. Equipment needed for this phase of the construction would include a drill rig. The total impact for the area is an estimated 1 acre. An enclosure will be erected to limit vandalism and damage.

The Taos Pueblo selected the proposed well location and depth based on considerations of water availability and ability to operate the well without impacting other permitted well pumpers.

## **Environmental Impacts**

The following resources and socioeconomic factors were evaluated in detail in the Environmental Assessment for anticipated impacts from installation of a drought relief well project: land, hydrology, vegetation, wildlife, social considerations, cultural resources, threatened and endangered species, Indian Trust Assets, environmental justice and cumulative effects. The following resources are discussed further:

### **Land**

No impact would occur to geography or geology as a result of the proposed action as this occurs in a previously disturbed area. The construction and installation of the proposed pump house, drill site, staging area, and wells would be built so that no mitigation measures would be needed. Soils and vegetation disturbance would be kept to a minimum, with vegetation cover left undisturbed whenever possible. Erosion is expected to be minimal due to limited land contour.

The land for the proposed action is not utilized for grazing or farming. Impact due to the proposed action would not be significant.

## **Water/Hydrology**

The 94 surrounding wells within a 1500' radius will not be impacted by these proposed wells. Any drilling or water quality related permits would be the responsibility of the tribe and/or contractor to obtain, including the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) general permit.

## **Vegetation**

Construction activities that disturb vegetation would be kept to a minimum within the proposed, previously disturbed site. Associated impacts would be considered temporary and not significant.

## **Wildlife**

The proposed action is expected to temporarily disturb and displace wildlife on or near the area during construction and drilling activities.

## **Social Considerations**

The proposed action would have a slight beneficial impact on employment because of the construction of the transmission lines but no significant impacts on long-term demographic trends.

## **Cultural Resources**

A cultural resources/archaeological survey were not completed as the proposed site is a previously disturbed site. A search in the Archaeological Records Management Section was conducted and no sites were identified. No significant or eligible historic properties were located. It was determined that the proposed action would have no effect on cultural resources.

## **Threatened and Endangered Species**

The proposed action is expected to have no effect on federally listed threatened or endangered species.

## **Indian Trust Assets**

The water supply and water rights associated with the proposed well are Indian Trust Assets which will be benefited from the proposed project. The Pueblo supports this project and its construction and presence on trust lands. Therefore, no adverse impact to Indian Trust Assets would result from the proposed action. The proposed action would utilize existing easements for the majority of construction and operations activities.

## **Environmental Justice**

In following the Executive Order 12898 of 1994, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations," the proposed action could positively affect minority and low-income populations. The project would enrich those populations with drought relief water.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

Cumulative impacts as a result of the construction and installation of a pump house, drilling site, staging area, and drilling wells are expected to be minimal. The drill sites would be in a previously disturbed field. Selection of this site was based on proximity to need and previous ground disturbance. A chain link fence would be constructed around the pump house to prevent vandalism.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis present in the EA, Reclamation finds that there would be not significant impacts associated with the proposed action. Reclamation makes this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and the Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500). Reclamation has determined that the proposed action does not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment. Therefore, no environmental impact statement will be prepared for this proposal.